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Armant: recent discoveries at the temple of Montu-Re

In 2002 the joint Franco-Egyptian Archaeological Mission at Armant resumed fieldwork on the main temple of Montu-Re, partly uncovered by an EES team in the 1930s. **Christophe Thiers** describes the main results of the most recent campaign.

After their successful archaeological investigation of the Bucheum at Armant, 15 km south of modern Luxor on the west bank of the Nile, in the 1935-36 season Robert Mond and Oliver Myers started to excavate the site's main temple of Montu-Re. Completely destroyed down to its foundation courses from the fourth-fifth centuries AD onward, the temple of the falcon-headed solar deity was not visible above ground to the earliest European travellers who visited Armant to see the famous *mammisi* of Cleopatra. Although their work revealed most of the foundations of the temple, Mond and Myers concentrated on the Roman-Byzantine village which had developed close to the New Kingdom pylon. In the forecourt and in front of the pylon, they uncovered foundation deposits of Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut while a stela of Tuthmosis III (Cairo JE 66377) was found lying on the floor of a Coptic house. Numerous blocks and artefacts from various periods were found during these campaigns. The EES team cleaned the foundation platform but did not

study it at all and they stopped work without finishing the clearance of the temple.

The Middle Kingdom temple of Montu-Re was built of limestone and was completely dismantled and reused in the foundations of the late Ptolemaic temple, especially in the *naos* dedicated by Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos. The limestone blocks were reused in between the sandstone Ptolemaic walls and also as the flooring of the crypts. The New Kingdom temple made of sandstone and limestone was reused in the *pronaos*: Tuthmosis III and Hatshepsut are the main pharaohs attested, but there is also evidence for earlier building activity with a limestone door jamb of King Ahmose and a limestone stela of King Kamose. During the late Ptolemaic Period the temple was completely rebuilt but the New Kingdom pylon was retained in its original location. It bears a famous depiction of a rhinoceros (see p.1), scenes of Nubians bringing offerings and a list of foreign countries.

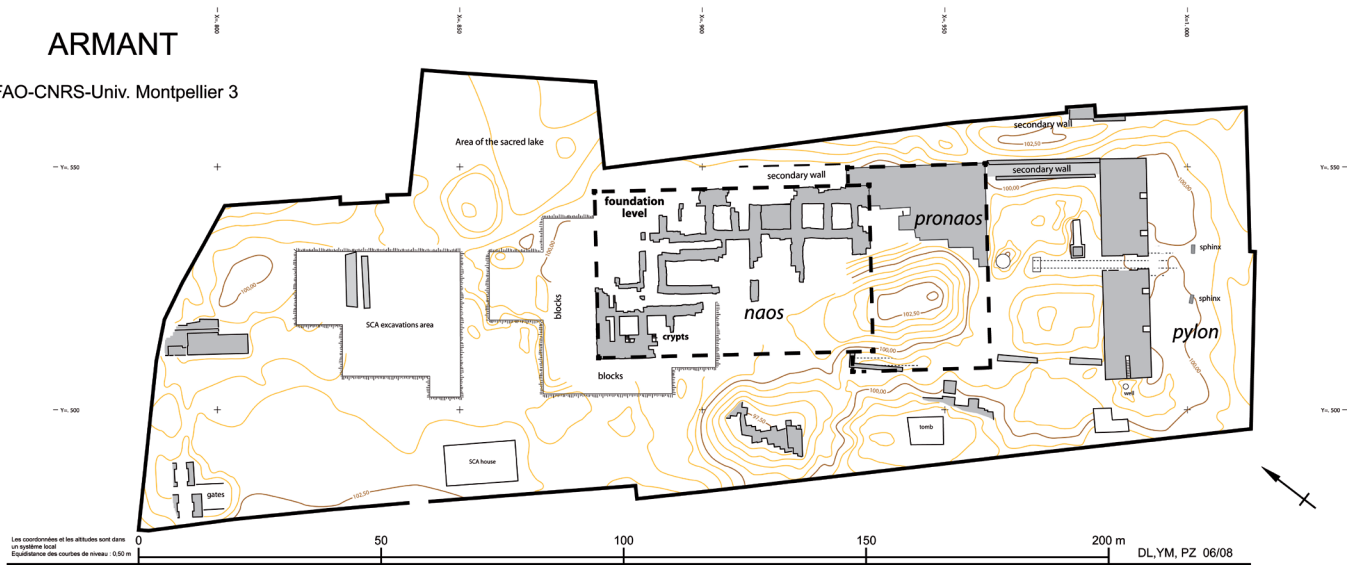
The current fieldwork which is a joint mission of IFAO, the CNRS (USR 3172-CFEETK) and the University of Montpellier 3 intends to complete the excavation and cleaning of the foundation platform of the temple which is still partially covered with debris. The main aims are to determine the plan of the temple and to survey and study all the loose and reused blocks found in the field. Since 2004 a huge effort has been made to remove the debris which covers the south-west part of the temple, this area having been used by Mond and Myers as the



General view of the temple of Montu-Re at Armant. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Christophe Thiers

ARMANT

IFAO-CNRS-Univ. Montpellier 3



General plan of the temple area at Armant. Plan © IFAO-CNRS/Damien Laisney, Yassin Mohammed and Pierre Zignani

dump for their Decauville railway. In November 2011 and 2012 the surviving parts of the foundation courses of the south-west part of the *naos* and *pronaos* were reached and Middle Kingdom blocks were uncovered, reused in the Ptolemaic construction. This level is extremely interesting because it is almost the deepest one reached by the lime burners and by local inhabitants searching for stones to reuse. Thus we expected to find numerous blocks which were not completely broken and during these two seasons pedestal blocks with the name of Hadrian were uncovered, most probably belonging to

the same wall as those in Grenoble Museum which were purchased in Armant by Comte de Saint Ferriol in 1841–42. A granodiorite Ptolemaic private statue was also found, but unfortunately without an inscription on its back pillar.

In November 2013 the cleaning of the destruction layers of the Montu Temple continued with work especially focused on the area of the *pronaos*. Its south-west part had been extensively looted and it is thus much less well preserved than its opposite part. But an important area of the *pronaos* foundation was uncovered, revealing, as expected, some reused sandstone blocks of the New



General view of the excavated area. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Christophe Thiers



Façade of the west part of the pronaos. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Christophe Thiers



The naos held by Nebamun, and its left side. Photographs © CNRS-CFEETK/Jessie Maucor

Kingdom. The foundation courses of the *pronaos* façade were also almost entirely unearthed.

The excavation of this destruction level, full of sand, mortar and sandstone chips resulting from the breaking-up of blocks, brought to light a beautiful limestone statue (93cm high) of Nebamun, called Nyia, unfortunately found with its head and part of its torso missing. Nebamun was ‘Scribe (and) Physician of the Lord of the Two Lands’. Sitting on a chair, he is holding a *naos* housing the falcon-headed god Montu, seated upon a throne. On each side of Nebamun’s chair, his wife and his mother are depicted, seated on chairs and each holding a *sistrum* and a *menit*. They are shown wearing fine pleated clothes, as are well attested during the late Eighteenth and beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasties. Two other figures of Nebamun seem to have been carved on both sides of the *naos*. A granodiorite statue of the same man was found by Adel Farid in the 1980s (*MDAIK* 39, 1983) when excavating in the northern part of the site, and the texts covering the two statues are very similar, though a few differences can be noted.

A few metres away from the statue of Nebamun, a headless granodiorite statue (68.5cm high) of the ‘High-Priest of Montu from Armant’ Ramose was unearthed. Over a pleated kilt covering his legs, he wears a panther skin adorned with stars and the head of the panther appears on the right side of his torso. Ramose is shown kneeling and holding an altar upon which two falcon heads are carved in the round. Each falcon-head was probably topped by a sun-disk and two feathers, but these are lost. These two manifestations of the local god Montu are quite unexpected and seem to have no parallels in that aspect, although some Late Period bronze statuettes of deities with two falcon heads are known. There is also the double prow *aegis* of the Montu barque which is attested in quite rare documents. These two very original statues are beautifully carved and can be considered as



The statue of Nebamun. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Jessie Maucor



The statue of Ramose. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Jessie Maucor



The five royal heads as found, with the priest's head and the stela visible at the right. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Jessie Maucor

masterpieces of New Kingdom private art. After a few days of work cleaning them, they were taken to the MSA storeroom in Moalla. Study of the texts covering the base and the back-pillar of the two statues will certainly provide new data about these two high-ranking officials, their role in the Theban area and their relationship with the god Montu of Armant.

On the central axis of the *pronaos*, close to its sandstone foundation blocks, a large (158cm x 131cm) limestone slab dating to the reign of Amenemhat I and carved with a relief figure of Anubis (or a Soul of Nekhen) holding the hand of the king was found. Inside a recess formed by few of these foundation blocks, five royal heads (each c.70cm high) were unearthed. Four of them wear the Double Crown while the fifth one, found upside down, has the White Crown. The disposition of the five heads in the ground clearly shows that they were intentionally grouped together in quite a small area. In between the heads three rounded upper parts of White Crowns were also found. One of these had been deposited close to the head to which it belongs. Each of the royal heads had been painted in red (for the skin and Red Crown) and blue



The priest's head which was found to join the Ramose statue. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Jessie Maucor

(beard and eyebrows) while the cobra on each forehead was painted blue and yellow (see also the front cover photograph). The heads need further restoration and conservation work and a precise stylistic study will be necessary to try to identify the king, or kings, depicted on these colossi, but preliminary study would suggest that they date to the New Kingdom.

Beside one of the royal heads a small limestone stela and a granodiorite priest's head (19cm high) were found. The stela, which measures 22cm x 18.5cm x 8cm, belongs to a man named Iufaa and dates to the Third Intermediate Period. The six heads and the stela would not seem to be ideal for reuse as masonry but they had been deliberately deposited within the structure, and are probably to be considered not as a *cachette* or a foundation deposit but more probably as a consecration deposit. Further excavation will be necessary to refine this preliminary hypothesis.

All these pieces were taken to Moalla on the last day of the work and once they were in the MSA storeroom, we were able to see that the granodiorite head which was uncovered close to the royal heads belonged to the statue of Ramose found earlier – a very satisfying conclusion to the 2013 season.

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The team and the five royal heads. Photograph © CNRS-CFEETK/Jessie Maucor